Reviewer's report

Title: Improving participation rates by providing choice on participation mode: Two randomized controlled trials.

Version: 2 Date: 1 December 2014

Reviewer: Shaun Scholes

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors briefly mention that readers should be cautious when interpreting the generalisability of their findings. In the discussion the authors could perhaps state again that patients with cognitive impairments and poor language skills were excluded from the study.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. How was an interview or questionnaire judged to be 'completed' for the follow-up survey? Given the survey population I would have expected a number of partial interviews (i.e. terminated interviews / partially completed questionnaires).

2. The sample characteristics for each Trial (Table 1) could be shown separately for the single format vs. choice groups.

3. Tables 3 and 4 could be written as: willing to participate, n (%): participation, n (%). Telephonic interview would be clearer than interview. X2 (chi-square test) and RR (relative risk) need to be spelled out as abbreviations to the table.

4. References: There are a number of typos in the references (e.g. American Association of Public Opinion Research).

Discretionary Revisions

1. Given the data collected in the baseline survey (including sex, age and risk of cardiovascular disease) I would have liked the researchers to examine subgroup differences in the participation rates. This would allow some consideration of the issue of bias.

2. The authors explain that participants who indicated that they were willing to participate by both modes of participation were all sent a questionnaire. This may have had a detrimental impact on response – a patient indicated a willingness to participate by both modes but could not in practice respond by telephone – and so may have been discouraged to participate. Perhaps the authors could do a sensitivity analysis and compare participation rates between single vs choice excluding those participants who expressed no preference in their mode of participation.
3. Abstract: Line 28 could be made clearer (e.g. conditional participate rate was higher for those offered a single format invitation for interview).

4. It would be useful to know the proportions of younger/middle-aged adults who used the Internet on a daily basis to put the figures given for older adults into context.

5. The results would be clearer - in my opinion - if the Relative Risks were presented comparing those who were offered choice vs those offered a single format invitation (i.e. opposite to the way presented).

6. The authors compare their findings with Denniston et al (reference 13) with respect to the participation rate and the willingness to participate. They do not mention any comparison with respect to conditional participation. Was this also examined by Denniston et al, and if so, what did they find?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.